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# The importance of country-related connections in pictures and slogans for COO products in print advertisements

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# **The importance of country related connections in pictures and slogans for COO products in print advertisements**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the effectiveness of the use of country-of-origin (COO) connections in slogans and/or pictures for different COO product print advertisements. We evaluate if marketers can benefit from focusing on COO-connections in the slogans/texts used and/or in the ‘visualization’ of the ad by adding pictures of the country concerned. Based on a 4x2x2 between subject design, we have analysed the impact on the attitude towards the advertisement, towards the product, towards the quality of the product and on purchase intentions. We have carried out a pre-test to select COO pictures and slogans for the different products. The research results of our empirical study suggest that COO visualization can be significantly effective. However, contrary to the existing literature, we do not find significantly better scores for COO (language) slogans used in advertisements. We find preliminary indications that visual stimuli ‘crowd out’ linguistic (e.g. claims). Our results suggest that marketers should take visual COO associations into account since visual COO stimuli seem more effective than linguistic COO stimuli.

**Keywords:** *Country-of-origin, local language, slogan*

## **1. Review of the literature**

The use of country-of-origin associations has been largely investigated and developed from different perspectives. According to the country-of-origin effect theory, an advertisement will be more effective if consumers associate the product with its country of origin (Hornikx et al., 2007). There are obviously positive and negative associations, but the ability of the advertisers stays also in the capacity of recalling in the consumers' mind mainly the positive ones, for instance style and fashion for France, good quality for German cars, tasty food for Italy.

Elliott & Cameron (1994) found that country-of-origin plays an important role in influencing consumers' buying behavior. Hornikx et al. (2007) studied the interaction of slogans in foreign languages in advertisements. Pereira et al. (2002), focused on the countries-images, maintaining that the association between the product and its country of origin is the starting point for a product's judgment. However, Profeta et al. (2012) show that not all customers are conscious of the country-of-origin indication and that also many do not actually care about this characteristic of the product (Profeta et al., 2012).

As stressed by Hornikx and Starren (2008), the use of foreign words in advertising started as a loan from another language. Nowadays foreign words are included in an advertisement in order to create a mental association and to recall an image. The most commonly and frequently found language in advertising is English. Many advertisers use the English language not only because of global campaigns, but also for saving in translation, adaptation and registration costs (Hornikx and Starren, 2008; Gerritsen et al., 2000). Gerritsen et al. (2000) investigated the use of English in advertisements in newspapers and magazines in Spain, Italy, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The results show that in some countries the presence of standardized/ English campaign is more widespread (France 22 per cent of

advertisements were in English, Germany and the Netherlands 19 per cent), while in other ones it is less common (Italy and Spain 6 and 7 per cent) (Gerritsen et al., 2000).

Worldwide campaigns of companies are more likely to create a “global corporate brand image that has similar positioning in international markets” (Hornikx et al., 2010); this image is created not only through the standardized slogan, but also with the logo, the image and the brand name (Hornikx et al., 2010). The standardization process has received much criticism. Among others, De Mooij (2005) asserts that an advertisement adapted to local tastes and culture will be more successful due to the existence of different value hierarchies: in fact, a product’s characteristic that is important in one culture could be totally irrelevant in another one. Hornikx et al. (2010) summarize the findings of their studies about culturally adapted versus culturally unadapted ad appeals. They discovered that, in general, ads with culturally adapted value appeals are more persuasive and better liked than the non-adapted ones. As the authors suggest, the debate between adaptation and standardization is not limited to value appeals: the language of the ad itself is considered to be a powerful means for adapting or standardizing an ad. The debate, however, if it is better to use English (standardize) or the local language (adapt) is still going on (Hornikx et al., 2010).

Foreign languages are also used as a symbol for which the exact literal meaning in the foreign language does not matter (Kelly-Holmes, 2008; Ray, et al. 1991). According to Kelly-Holmes (2008) advertisers have two main purposes, a communicative and a symbolic one. According to Kelly-Holmes (2008) in the majority of cases the use of foreign languages in advertising has a main symbolic purpose. This kind of use of a foreign language may be called “a language/linguistic fetish”, whose main principle states that the symbolic associations evoked by a foreign language in a determined ad are more important than what the utterance literally refers to. Therefore, as reported by Kelly-Holmes (2008), symbolic meanings are highly important in advertising: this is why for some products advertisers tend

to use the original language (for example “parfum” in French or “Bier” in German). A very common example is given by the German automobiles producer Audi, which uses its original German slogan “Vorsprung durch Technik” also for its advertisements in non-German speaking countries. As explained by Kelly-Holmes (2008), the connection between the product (car), the country of origin of the product (Germany), the language (German) and the competence (in this case the technical quality in producing cars) is direct. Where does this connection come from? The answer is clearly given by Hornikx et al. (2007), who recall the work of Kelly-Holmes and state that the products and competences that are connected to a particular country find their roots in people’s perceptions about that country. They can be based on personal experience (holidays in that country, for example) or on common knowledge coming from the media (Hornikx et al., 2007). For a product to be appreciated, this association between language/country and stereotypes should recall positive images: According to this association “if the symbolic associations are valued positively” the product and or service that is advertised with the association will be valued positively as well (Hornikx and Starren, 2008).

As underlined above, foreign languages are not used by chance in advertisements; on the contrary, they are chosen on purpose for creating a specific fit with the advertised product and with a relevant quality of the country where this product is made. This link between product, country and language is related as the so-called country-of-origin (COO) effect, which states that “it is more effective to relate a product to a country that consumers associate with this product than to relate a product to another country” (Hornikx et al., 2007). Agrawal and Kamakura (1999) suggest that the country-of-origin effect has a significant effect on consumers’ behaviour and that it is used by the consumer as a reliable indicator for a brand’s quality. The authors mention that if consumers hold a positive product-country image for a certain product and country, this would lead to a positive judgement towards all the brands of

a product associated with that country (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999). Of course, the COO effect is only one of the factors which influence a product choice, however, it represents a trustworthy cue for quality of the product (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999).

The importance of the COO as an indicator of product quality has been investigated also by Elliott and Cameron (1994), who firstly hypothesize that there could be a bias involved in consumers' evaluations of products and a tendency to choose home-country products. To prove this, they conducted a survey of around 400 Australian people and examined the importance of COO relative to other product characteristics. They asked whether COO can be an indicator of a product quality and also what the relationship is between COO and purchase intention. Elliott and Cameron (1994) found that respondents expressed a general preference for locally made products and that indeed country-of-origin plays an important role in influencing consumers' purchase decisions making behaviour (Elliott and Cameron, 1994).

According to Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) mental images in the minds of consumers in the end motivate consumer behaviour; this means that 'images' related to a product or a brand become the way people perceives the product or the brand; similarly, a country 'image' can also be defined as the 'mental' picture of a country. This suggests that marketers have to focus on 'images' also in their slogans used in their campaigns. Marketers have to try to recall in the mind of the consumers the positive associations that a certain country has, "when national image produces a favourable consumer response, manufacturers and indeed, country administrations are keen to promote them". In a study among 20.000 consumers in 20 countries in Europe, Asia and America, Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) found that there is a connection between a product of a country and consumers' perception of the country and that certain patriotic bias could also interfere with the consumers' purchase. This means, for example, that Italian people are more prone to buy Italian products. This suggests that

patriotism affects choices (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001). Profeta et al. (2008) analysed the influence of a COO label applied to branded food products, specifically to German beer. They have investigated the impact of geographical indicators such as 'Bavarian' or 'Munich' beer. They found for a weak and not well-known brand that the COO label played a positive and determinant role on consumers' choice decision and that the COO indicator was specifically determinant when price or market information were missing. Profeta et al. (2012) analysed whether the COO actually plays a determinant role when purchasing packaged meat, dairy products and beer in a big German food retailer (EDEKA). Their survey was conducted directly in the store, behind the cash register. The consumers were asked about their knowledge of the origin of the products they recently purchased. They found that 22 per cent of the sample was aware of the origin of the products; moreover, the majority of people correctly identified the COO of a product (almost 90 per cent) and also admitted that there is a positive relationship between the origin of the product and their evaluation of the quality of the product. However, 78 per cent of the sample did not care about the origin of the product. Similar results were found earlier by Kemp et al. (2010). They analysed the buying behaviour of UK consumers (N=251), and found that COO as reason of buying the product had only ranking number seven. Product characteristics which were more important were: price, brand or specific variety, preference for portion size, freshness, the 'only option available' and the usual/preferred choice. Davidson et al. (2003) found, on the other hand, that country of origin played an important role in the purchase decision of urban and rural Scottish consumers (N=160). In their research 77% of their respondents reported that they sought origin information and only 23% reported never seek for COO information.



## **2. Research design**

On the basis of the literature we decided to investigate if consumers feel more attracted to marketing communication of products if it contains country-of-origin associations. More specific, we analyse if the use of country-of-origin pictures and slogans in advertisements influence the attitude towards the advertisement, the attitude towards the product, the attitude towards the quality of the product and the purchase intentions. We have manipulated the advertisements of four different fast moving consumer goods with the slogan (COO language associations versus no COO language associations) and the picture (specific COO picture versus no specific COO picture). In a preliminary research a pre-selection of the COO related slogans and pictures was made for the different products. The 4 (products) X 2 (slogans) X 2 (pictures) between subjects design was tested on a Belgian sample whereby the products had no COO relation with the subjects.

## **3. Research method**

### ***3.1 Preliminary research: preparation and evaluation of the research stimuli***

We ran a pre-test to select related pictures and slogans for the different products for the questionnaire. In total 33 Belgian participants (60.6% male participants; average age 24.39 years, *sd* 8.62 years) joined the pre-test. Every participant scored twelve different pictures on a 10 points scale whereby 0 means no relation with the country and 10 means a very strong relationship with the country. A pre-selection of the pictures was made by the authors. For every picture we have asked the relationship of the picture with France, Germany, Spain and Italy. 6 different pictures were country related (the Eiffeltoren, Colosseum, Tower of Pisa, Parc Guëll and the Sagrada Familia) and they were ‘mixed’ with 6 different pictures which were not country related (family on a hill, lawn, friends together, a peacock, a cornfield and

clouds). For the slogans we also investigated the relationship with the four different countries. For every country four different product related slogans were analysed. For France we have used wine and cheese and use in two country related slogans the words ‘une experience exclusive’ and ‘le meilleur fromage du monde’, for Germany we have used ‘unser bier, ihre wahl, schol!’ (see also Hornickx and Starren, 2008) and ‘unsere bratwurst, das original’; for Spain we used the words ‘Paella el sabor auténtico’ and ‘oranges muy bueno’ and for the Italian language and products we have used ‘pizza, delizioso!’ and ‘mamma-mia’.

The research results for the different pictures show the highest score for the Eiffel tower for France (9.67), The Brandenburger tower for Germany (7.12), Parc Guëll for Spain (9.49) and the Tower of Pisa for Italy (9.97). The picture of the family on a hill has compared to the other pictures the lowest score for the relationship with the different countries (France, Germany, Italy and Spain). For the slogans ‘une experience exclusive’ (France, 5.94), ‘ihre wahl, schol’ (Germany, 7.49), ‘paella el sabor auténtico’ (Spain, 6.42) and ‘delizioso’ (Italy, 6.49) have the highest COO related score.

### **3.2      *Research design***

In studying whether differences occur for: (1) COO related versus unrelated COO specific pictures (2) COO related versus unrelated COO language specific slogans, a distinction was made for four different COO related products. Based on literature we have selected four products: beer from Germany, wine from France, paella from Spain and Pizza from Italy (see also Hornickx and Starren, 2008; Hornickx and Hof, 2008). The selected products have no COO relation with the (potential) Belgian participants of the Study.

On this basis the following three research questions were formulated: (1) Do the related picture of the country on the one hand and the related (language) slogan of the country on the other hand significantly influence the advertising effectiveness (Aad, AP, PI, attitude

towards the quality of the product) of the print advertisements? (2) Do the selected products significantly influence the ad effectiveness of COO? (3) Do individual characteristics of the participants (e.g. knowledge of the country, language) significantly influence the ad effectiveness of COO?

To test the above research questions, sixteen different questionnaires were created for the study. In each questionnaire one print-advertisements was included. In Figure 1 advertisements with and without country related picture and slogan for products of Spain and Italy are presented.



**Figure 1:** Advertisements with and without country related picture and slogan

### 3.3 Sample

Data were collected using an online survey tool ([www. Qualtrics.com](http://www.Qualtrics.com)). A self-selecting sample of 566 Belgian (Dutch speaking) participants (48.0% males) with an average age of 24.95 years ( $sd = 8.30$  years; maximum 65 years, minimum 18 years) participated in the survey and completed the questionnaire. They were divided at random in sixteen experimental groups. No significant differences were found between age ( $F[15, 551] = 0.768$ ,  $p = .714$ ) and gender ( $X^2_{\text{gender}}(15) = 11.606$ ,  $p = .709$ ) between the experimental groups. The subjects were not informed about the subject of the research.

### **3.4 Procedure and measurement instruments**

The first page of the online questionnaire was an introductory page. Participants were informed that the study was undertaken by our university and that there were no commercial intentions. We also instructed them to report their own opinion, assuring them there were no right or wrong answers. On the second page, we instructed them to carefully look at the ad. Directly after viewing the ad, the attitude towards the ad (Aad; a 6-item-7-point semantic differential scale based on Mitchell & Olson, 1981, positive/negative; (not) attractive; (not) convincing; (not) credible, (not) interested and (not) attracts me;  $\alpha = .93$ ; total variance explained 74.74%) and the attitude towards the product ('AP'; a 5-item 7-point semantic differential scale based on Batra et al., 1999;  $\alpha = .92$ ; 76.89%) was measured. Afterwards, purchase intentions (PI, a 4-item 7-point Likert scale based on Bower & Landreth, 2001,  $\alpha = .94$ ; 85.29%) and attitude towards the quality of the product (AQ, a 4-item 7-point Likert scale based on Buchanan et al., 1999) were measured. Subsequently, on a next page, we asked the participants to what extent the following factors are important in evaluating a product in the advertisement: the background-, the slogan and the fit between the country and the product (all questions were on a 7-points scale). Finally, we enquired about (a) the participants knowledge of the language (German, French, Italian and Spanish) used in the advertisement in the questionnaire, (b) gender and (c) age. The average time to fill out the questionnaire was 6-7 minutes.

### **3.5 Research results**

For the first research question, we analysed the different average scores for Aad, the attitude towards the product (AP), PI and attitude towards the quality of the product (AQ) for the different treatments. In Table 1 the different average scores for advertisements with a country of origin (COO) related picture and slogan and without are presented. The research

results show that COO related pictures significantly influence the different attitudes (all p-values of the t-values show that the differences are significant). Advertisements with a picture of the COO score significantly higher than advertisements without this COO picture. For the advertisements with COO related slogans we did not find significant differences for the different attitudes scores.

**Table 1:** Mean scores Aad, AP, PI and AQ for COO related advertisements.

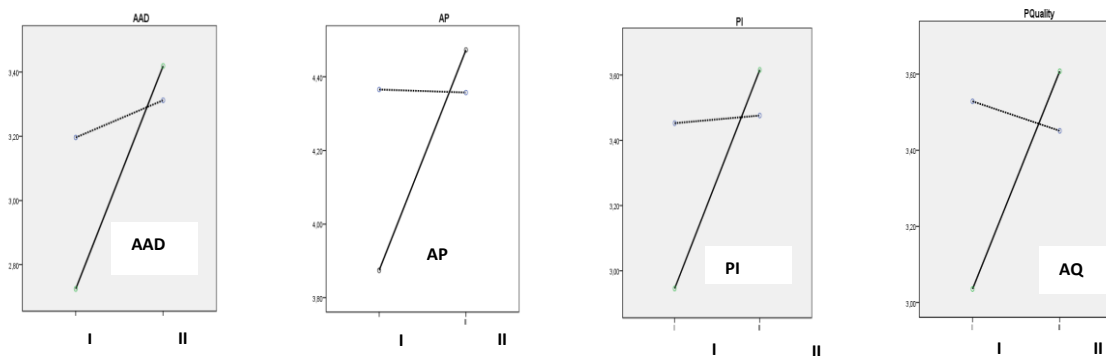
	AAD	AP	PI	AQ
COO-Picture (N=290)	3,25 (1.48)	4,33 (1.44)	3,42 (1.50)	3.42 (1.31)
No-COO-picture (N=278)	2,83 (1.23)	4,06 (1.51)	3,16 (1.47)	3.23 (1.20)
t-value (p-value)	3.68 ( $<.001$ )	2.19 (0.03)	2.09 (0.04)	1.86 (0.06)
COO-slogan (N=289)	3.12 (1.40)	4.17 (1.52)	3.31 (1.50)	3.34 (1.23)
No-COO-slogan (N=279)	2.95 (1.34)	4.20 (1.44)	3.26 (1.50)	3.30 (1.29)
t-value (p-value)	1.49 (0.14)	0.23 (0.82)	0.38 (0.70)	0.44 (0.66)

For the second research question, we analysed the possible influences of the investigated products in our design. No significant differences were found for the different products (beer, wine, paella and cheese) and also no significant interaction effects between the products and COO related pictures and products and COO related slogans were found.

For the third research question we investigated possible influences of individual characteristics of the participants. The research results of the first MANCOVA show that the attitudes towards the advertisements with or without a picture of the COO were also significantly influenced by the extent to which participants found that background picture used in advertisements are important. This can be considered as a proxy for the importance attracted to visual stimuli. As expected, significant interaction effects were found for Aad ( $F[1, 567] = 5.523$ ,  $p = .019$ ), AP ( $F[1, 567] = 4.841$ ,  $p = .028$ ), PI ( $F[1, 567] = 5.576$ ,  $p =$

.019) and AQ ( $F[1, 567] = 7.963, p = .005$ ). In all the cases the participants who found the visual backgrounds of advertisements important also gave significantly higher scores on the different attitudes when visual COO claims were made whereas participants who did not find visual backgrounds of advertisements important did not significantly change their attitude with or without a related COO background. In Figure 2 this interaction effect is visualized for Aad, AP, PI and AQ whereby the solid line indicates the average scores for the participants who find the background very important and the dashed line indicates the average scores for the participants who find it not important. On the left side of the x-axis of the different figures are the scores for the ads with no COO related pictures (I) and on the right side the scores of the ads with COO related pictures (II).

**Figure 2:** Average Aad, AP, PI and AQ scores



Furthermore, we find the same ‘interaction effects’ for the COO related picture and the participants who found the fit between the country and the product very important and the participants who found this relatively unimportant. PI ( $F[1, 564] = 5.163, p = .023$ ) and AQ ( $F[1, 564] = 5.933, p = .015$ ), but not for Aad ( $F[1, 564] = 2.038, p = .154$ ) and AP ( $F[1, 564] = 2.650, p = .104$ ). These results seem obvious, however, when we divided the participants into two groups according to their scores on the importance of the text in an advertisement, we did not find significant differences for COO slogans compared to slogans not invoking COO. Also, no significant interaction effects were found for the importance of fit between the

country and the products on the one hand and the COO slogans used in the advertisements on the other hand. Knowledge of the language - depending on the advertisement we have asked about knowledge of German, French, Italian and Spanish – also did not influence the scores participants gave to the different slogans used in an advertisement.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The findings of our research differ significantly from the results emerging from the literature on the COO effect and COO language associations (Hornikx et al., 2007; Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999; Hinner, 2010; Pereira et al., 2002; Elliott and Cameron, 1994; Verlegh et al., 2005; Profeta et al., 2012; Davidson et al., 2003). In all these studies, a positive relationship is found between the use of COO associations in the language used in the advertisements and the effectiveness. However, these studies do not take visual COO stimuli into account; they focus exclusively on linguistic COO claims for COO products (e.g. pasta for Italy). Our research results present a mixed picture. We find significantly higher scores on Aad, AP, PI and PQ for the different product advertisements with COO related pictures compared to those without COO related visualization. However, for COO related slogans we do not find significant relationships. This could suggest that visual COO stimuli are much more effective than linguistic COO claims and that when these two are combined the former crowd out the latter. We have made a preliminary test of this hypothesis by checking whether the effectiveness of the COO linguistic claims is ‘larger’ and significant for participants who indicate a low responsiveness to visual stimuli and high responsiveness to textual stimuli. These participants might be more comparable to participants of the existing studies in the literature (which is mainly situated in the language sciences). The preliminary results show indeed that the advertisements with COO slogans were scored significantly higher<sup>1</sup>. This

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<sup>1</sup> For Aad ( $M_{\text{COO slogan}} = 3.75$ ,  $M_{\text{no-COO slogan}} = 2.99$ ;  $t$ -value 2.01;  $p=0.049$ ), AP ( $M_{\text{COO slogan}} = 5.03$ ,  $M_{\text{no-COO slogan}} = 4.15$ ;  $t$ -value 2.39;  $p=0.02$ ). Also for AQ ( $M_{\text{COO slogan}} = 3.25$ ,  $M_{\text{no-COO slogan}} = 3.85$ ;  $t$ -value 1.66;  $p=0.104$ ) and PI ( $M_{\text{COO slogan}} = 3.70$ ,  $M_{\text{no-COO slogan}} = 3.35$ ;  $t$ -value 0.85;  $p=0.398$ ) higher scores were found for the COO slogans however not significantly higher.

‘crowding out’ hypothesis should, however, be tested in different settings, using a greater variety of products, visual stimuli and participants of different nationalities. Overall, our results suggest that visual COO stimuli are more effective than linguistic COO stimuli. Further research should also take other COO related cultural aspects of participants into account to investigate the effectiveness of COO associations in advertising.

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